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ABSTRACT

Since 1993, the Delaware Department of Correction has offered a Life Skills Program in its four state prisons. Each year, as many as 300 inmates (of the 5,000 housed inmates) enroll in the program, and nearly 85 percent of them graduate. The 4-month program has three major components: academics, violence reduction, and applied life skills. The core of the program is Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT), a systematic process of raising the moral reasoning level of students through a series of moral and cognitive stages. Students read "How to Escape Your Prison," a workbook developed especially for inmates that includes group exercises designed to achieve this goal. Research in other prisons suggests that MRT may be effective in reducing recidivism. An independent evaluation of the Delaware Life Skills Program found that, for the first program cycle, 19 percent of Life Skills students in the prisons reoffended within 1 year after release, compared with 27 percent of a group of inmates who did not participate. Although the small numbers of offenders studied render the data not statistically significant, it is hoped that, as increasing numbers of graduates are released from prison, ongoing data collection will allow more definitive analysis and show the benefits of the Life Skills Program. (Contains 14 references and 9 resources.) (KC)

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The Delaware Department of Correction

Life Skills Program

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The Delaware Department of Correction Life Skills Program

by Peter Finn

The program helped in every aspect of my life—for example, on building self-esteem and not letting incidents get violent. When I decided to get a divorce, my wife took the kids, but I learned not to let my self-esteem get destroyed and to control my rage. So I didn't go do drugs. I still have the Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT) book. I looked at it on Thanksgiving Day. I saw it on the shelf, and it seemed to be saying to me "Come here!" I looked over the sketches of where I had wanted to see myself in 1, 5, 10, and 15 years. I've been out 2 years, but I'm already where I wanted to be in the book for my 15-year goals. My 20-year goal was to own my own business, but I already own my own home and I have a good job and a loving family.

— A program graduate

Prisons have been offering academic and life skills programs to inmates for many years. However, the Delaware Department of Correction has implemented an innovative 4-month Life Skills Program for prison inmates that does much more than teach traditional academic and applied life skills.

Delaware's Life Skills Program is offered in its four State prisons. In 1997, these facilities housed 5,000 inmates (including 930 pretrial detainees—Delaware has no jails). Each year, as many as 300 inmates enroll systemwide, and nearly 85 percent of them graduate.

Why Offer Life Skills?

In the fourth or fifth week of the program, we watched a video that showed [a program graduate] buying a house—and he's someone who's never done anything right. But he got himself a job. So I realized they [program staff] weren't blowing smoke in my face. The

Highlights

The Delaware Department of Correction offers a 4-month Life Skills Program twice a year to up to 150 minimum- and medium-security inmates during each cycle. The program, which meets for 3 hours every weekday, has three major components: academics, violence reduction, and applied life skills.

The core of Delaware's Life Skills Program is Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT), which is a systematic, step-by-step process of raising the moral reasoning level of students through a series of moral and cognitive stages. Students read *How to Escape Your Prison*, a workbook developed especially for inmates, that includes group exercises designed to achieve this goal.

Although MRT was designed as a tool for reducing violence, the five Life Skills teachers gear much of their academic and applied life skills work around MRT exercises and principles.

Research in other prisons suggests that MRT may be effective in reducing recidivism. An independent evaluation of the Delaware Life Skills Program found that, for the first program cycle, 19 percent of Life Skills students in the four State prisons reoffended within 1 year after release, compared with 27 percent of a group of inmates who did not participate. However, the number of students and nonparticipants examined was small, and the difference in recidivism rates between them was not statistically significant. Further analysis of existing data and ongoing data collection will shed new light on any correlation between the Delaware Life Skills Program and reduced recidivism.

Begun with a 3-year, U.S. Department of Education grant from the Office of Correctional Education totaling more than $900,000, the program is now funded entirely by the Delaware legislature at a cost of $145,000 in fiscal year 1997, or $577 for each of the 252 students who graduated that year.

The Link Between Educational Programs and Reduced Recidivism

A literature review failed to identify studies that have examined whether life skills programs have resulted in reduced recidivism.[a] A large number of studies have reported that adult academic education programs for inmates result in reduced recidivism. However, most of these studies have been inconclusive because of methodological weaknesses, such as small samples or short postrelease followup periods. In addition, many studies failed to assign inmates randomly to treatment and control groups, compare the characteristics of students with the characteristics of inmates who did not participate, or use statistical tests to ensure that the findings did not occur by chance. As a result, the researchers could not prove that students did well after release because the programs changed the inmates' behavior rather than because inmates who enrolled in them were so highly motivated to succeed that they would not have reoffended even if they had not participated in the programs.[b]

Several methodologically adequate studies concluded that some educational programs may result in reduced recidivism for some inmates. For example, after eliminating selection bias, a study of Federal inmates found that those who participated in education programs were significantly less likely than other inmates to reoffend for as long as 3 years after release. A study of Wisconsin inmates found that prison education programs were cost-effective in terms of reduced rates of return to prison and increased time until reincarceration.[c] However, other methodologically adequate studies have shown no correlation between participation in educational programs and recidivism.[d]

Studies suggest that education programs are most likely to succeed if students are housed separately from other inmates (as is done in one of the Delaware prisons), if the programs involve followup after release, and if they teach skills relevant to the marketplace.[e]

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Correctional Education and the Correctional Education Association are jointly working on a project that examines the impact of correctional education on the rate of recidivism. A total of 3,000 offenders, randomly selected from Maryland, Ohio, and Minnesota, who were within 3 months of release, were chosen for this 18-month study. Answers to the following research questions are anticipated: What is the relationship between correctional education and postrelease employment? Are certain types of correctional education programs more effective than others in reducing recidivism and promoting employment, and does their effectiveness differ for groups with different characteristics? Findings from this study are anticipated in late 1998.

Notes

a. See, for example Gerber, J., and E. J. Fritsch, "Adult Academic and Vocational Correctional Education Programs: A Review of Recent Research," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 22 (1995): 119–142.

b. See reviews of the available research, including Bushway, S., and P. Reuter, "Labor Markets and Crime Risk Factors," in Sherman, L.W., D. Gottfredson, D. MacKenzie, J. Eck, P. Reuter, S. Bushway, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1997; Flanagan, T. J., "Prison Education Research Project Final Report," Huntsville, Texas: Sam Houston State University, 1994; and Office of Correctional Education, "Recidivism Study Summaries," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1986–1993.

c. Harer, M.D., "Recidivism Among Federal Prison Releasees in 1987: A Preliminary Report," Unpublished Paper, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Office of Research and Evaluation, March 1994; Piehl, A.M., "Learning While Doing Time," Unpublished Paper. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, April 1994. See also, Adams, K., K.J. Bennett, T.J. Flanagan, J.W. Marquart, S. Cuvelier, E.J. Fritsch, J. Gerber, D.R. Longmire, and V.S. Burton, Jr., "Large-Scale Multidimensional Test of the Effect of Prison Education Programs on Offenders' Behavior," *Prison Journal* 74 (4) (1994): 433–449; Gerber and Fritsch, "Adult Academic and Vocational Correctional Education Programs" and Flanagan, "Prison Education Research Project Final Report."

d. Gerber and Fritsch, "Adult Academic"; Flanagan, "Prison Education."

e. See, for example, Gerber and Fritsch, "Adult Academic"; and Flanagan, "Prison Education."

program was for real. It's a unique program for a prison, because inmates always perform for the establishment while they're locked up, but this was the first evidence that I saw of a program working on the outside with something that started on the inside.

— A program graduate

In an attempt to give inmates the tools to avoid reoffending (and to keep them occupied), most State and Federal prisons, including those in Delaware, typically offer a range of educational programming. Several studies have reported that offenders who participate in educational programs while incarcerated are less likely to reoffend than inmates who do not enroll in educational programs (see "The Link Between Educational Programs and Reduced Recidivism"). However, many inmates have serious handicaps besides difficulty reading and writing that make it hard for them to reintegrate into society, including little or no experience in job hunting, uncontrolled anger, inability to establish healthy personal relationships, and failure to establish realistic—or any—goals. Many offenders also appear to lack the ability or willingness to choose ethical behavior over unethical behavior.[1]

PROGRAM FOCUS

A Sample Life Skills Class

Isabel Companiony teaches Life Skills in Delaware's only prison for women. On this particular day, class began at 8:30 a.m. with a session on buying a car. After a brief explanation of the "blue book" of car prices, Companiony distributed a handout of exercises in which students calculate how much they could offer to pay for a car based on specified percentages above the wholesale price. The handout provided retail and wholesale prices of six different cars. Companiony explained the exercise and passed out calculators.

Some women completed the exercise as a group, others individually. A few students asked another student for help. Companiony walked around the room checking on the students' progress and offered assistance as needed. Then she asked one student to go to the board and write down her calculations for the first part of the exercise; other members of the class helped the student do the math. Then a second student repeated the presentation. Companiony handed out a second exercise sheet on financing the car. The class repeated the procedure. The exercises involved calculating percentages and multiplication—for example, calculating monthly payments on a $4,400 loan at 13 percent for 4 years.

At 9:30 a.m., Companiony called a 15-minute break. At 9:45 a.m., class resumed and focused on an MRT exercise called "trading places," which requires students to identify someone with whom they would like to trade places temporarily. By forcing students to figure out exactly what they like or admire about that person, the exercise helped them determine what they value most in life.

One student volunteered to get up in front of the class to talk about why she would like to be her brother—because he has been very successful in life. However, talking about her envy helped her realize that she does not give herself enough credit for what *she* has done. After the student's presentation, Companiony asked her to leave the room, and the other students voted on whether she has "passed" one of MRT's 16 stages or "steps." (See "What Is MRT," page 5.) After a brief discussion, they agreed that she passed. Companiony told them, "I've seen her help you guys with your math, so tell her, 'I appreciate the help,' to help build her self-esteem." The student returned to the room to applause from the rest of the class. Other students then volunteered to speak to the class and the same procedure was followed. The class ended at 11:30 a.m.

To address these additional barriers to success, a number of corrections departments have implemented so-called life skills programs that provide inmates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to maintain strong family ties, find and keep good jobs, manage their finances, and lead productive lives (see "A Sample Life Skills Class").

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Correctional Education has funded 18 of these programs.[2] The Delaware Department of Correction Life Skills Program is one such program—now funded (see "Program Costs") entirely by the State of Delaware—that has been carefully evaluated.

The Delaware Life Skills Program runs 3 hours a day for 4 months. Each of 5 teachers conducts a morning and an afternoon course with 12 to 15 students in each course. Offered twice annually, with a 2-month interval between cycles, the program can accommodate 300 students each year. There is one teacher in each of the three minimum security institutions and two

Program Costs

The Delaware Life Skills Program was established through a 3-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Correctional Education awarded in November 1993, for a total of more than $916,000. The budget breakdown appears below.

Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Personnel	$236,308	$243,008	$221,988
Fringe Benefits	*	*	$76,494
Travel	$10,075	$13,261	$2,000
Equipment	$1,800	$1,800	0
Supplies	$28,130	$31,627	$5,000
Other	$1,461	$1,461	$1,471
Indirect Costs	$8289	$8,677	$8,289
Training Costs/Stipends	$7,545	$7,545	0
Total	**$293,608**	**$307,379**	**$315,242**

* Staff received no fringe benefits the first 2 years because they were contracted consultants.

When the State of Delaware took over funding, it provided $145,300, including $136,500 for five teachers' salaries for a 10-month year and $8,800 for supplies such as instructional materials, videotapes, and MRT workbooks. The program survives with less money than when the Department of Education funded it due to elimination of the program administrator's position, reduced need for staff training, and other economies.

The program's cost per graduate was $1,260 under Federal grant funding and $577 under State funding.

in the medium security facility.[1] The curriculum consists of three principal components—academics, violence reduction, and applied life skills.

Academics

- Reading comprehension
- Mathematics
- Language expression

Violence Reduction

- Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT)
- Anger management
- Conflict resolution training

Applied Life Skills

- Credit and banking
- Job search
- Motor vehicle regulations
- Legal responsibilities (e.g., restitution)
- Family responsibilities (e.g., child support)
- Health issues
- Social services
- Educational services
- Cultural differences
- Government and law

The Core: Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT)

The MRT steps helped me the most in Life Skills, beginning with the first step of honesty. That step is as clear in my mind today as if I just read it. I always felt, stealing, lying—politicians and preachers do it, so why not me? But I learned to do the right thing. Now I work for an employer who trusts me with the keys to his house. —A program graduate

Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT), a tool for reducing violence, is the core of the Delaware Life Skills Program. To many students, MRT *is* the Life Skills Program. Elaine Hawpe, a Life Skills teacher, says, "The bulk of what I do every day is MRT." George Dean, another teacher, reports, "I tie most of my teaching around MRT."

Instructors typically spread the MRT exercises across the 16-week Life Skills Program, devoting part of every class to MRT, spending the entire class on MRT, or skipping MRT entirely in a class to concentrate on other parts of the curriculum.

Photo by Lewis C. Tidball Productions

A student shares with the class what he has learned from an MRT step.

What Is MRT?

Moral Reconation Therapy is a nontraditional, cognitive-behavioral treatment for offenders, substance abusers, batterers, and other individuals with "resistant" personalities (see "Sources for Further Information" in order to contact Correctional Counseling, Inc., MRT's developer). The course uses a step-by-step process of raising the moral reasoning level of students through a series of 16 hierarchically graded moral and cognitive stages.[2] The course is taught primarily by means of group and workbook exercises. The exercises are designed to achieve therapeutic goals through educational means—that is, to alter the way individuals *act* by changing the way they *think*. A typical exercise asks students to draw pictures of their biggest problem areas and pictures of the things that they believe will lead them to happiness. Another exercise asks them to identify the five most satisfying and the five worst experiences in their lives and to consider what made each event good or bad. Yet another asks them to systematically examine how they spend their time. Each student shares his or her results with the rest of the class.

The program is used in corrections facilities such as prisons, halfway houses, and community corrections programs, as well as in drug courts

A Sample MRT Exercise on Moral Reasoning

Teacher Carol Eagle asked the class to gather in small groups and take part in an exercise. She described a hypothetical situation in which a killer typhoon is about to strike an island and asked each group to determine which 5 of the following 10 people they would allow to board a small raft and survive—and why: minister, doctor, mechanic, ocean scientist, farmer, judge, sports hero, journalist, teacher, and famous movie star. After 10 minutes of animated discussion, each group reported its selections to the rest of the class.

One group included the journalist "because he can write about the ones who didn't survive." Another group included the minister "because the survivors will need spiritual guidance in a time of crisis and he can pray for the ones who die." Yet another group reported, "We don't want anyone to die—we're trying to think positive and not have the moral burden of consigning someone to die—so we put everyone in a hollowed-out tree trunk."

Eagle then tied the exercise to real life scenarios.

Eagle: "But what if you have to cut loose old buddies when you get out?"

Student: "That's not analogous."

Eagle: "It is—what if it's your brother? Are you going to sink with him?"

Student: "If he's going to get arrested, I'm leaving him."

Another student: "I'll go down with him."

and probation departments in 32 States. More than 20,000 students participate each year. Instructors attend a 4-day training workshop during which they complete the exercises in the 128-page student workbook themselves. The workbook, *How to Escape Your Prison*, is designed specifically for inmates and written at a sixth-grade reading level.

As part of MRT, students also:

- Establish goals and identify the tools they will need to achieve them, including doing the right things in the right way.
- Assess the quality of their current relationships with other people and formulate a strategy for repairing and proceeding with valued relationships.
- Complete 20 hours of volunteer work.

Does MRT Work?

The developers of MRT first implemented it in the 1980s at a correctional facility in Shelby County, Tennessee. Starting in 1988, they followed 70 felony drug offenders who participated in the program, comparing them with 82 inmates who volunteered to participate but were rejected because there was no space. The developers included every third person on the waiting list in the control group. The two groups had the same average age, sentence length, and ethnic composition. By comparing the two groups, the developers found that, although "MRT treatment suppresses recidivism by 50 percent or more . . . [for] 1 or 2 years after treatment. . . . The initially large treatment effect clearly appears to level off and stabilize approximately 2 to 3 years after treatment." However, even after 7 years, MRT participants still had a statistically significant lower recidivism rate than nonparticipants—44 percent compared with 60 percent.[5] Recidivism was defined as being sentenced to prison or jail for any reason, including any violation of conditions of supervision.

The National Institute of Justice sponsored a study of MRT's effects on institutional behavior and recidivism among Oklahoma prison inmates after the Oklahoma Department of Corrections implemented the program in 1993 throughout the system. Examining the histories of 65,390 individuals under department of corrections supervision (nearly two-thirds probationers), the researchers tried to compare the behavior of inmates who participated in the MRT program with individuals who did and did not participate in other Oklahoma correctional programs while in prison. However, because inmates were not assigned randomly to the three groups, it was impossible to know whether program participants exhibited better behavior simply because they were more motivated to change than the other inmates.

Despite this significant limitation, by looking at participants' behavior before they enrolled in MRT, the researchers were able to examine how the students' subsequent behavior compared with the problem behavior they could have been expected to exhibit if they had not participated. The researchers drew the following conclusion:

The majority of the analysis results strongly suggested that initiation [of] and participation duration in MRT were associated with reduced risk of problem behavior (misconduct [while in prison] and recidivism incidents) on the part of the individuals who participated in it.

The promising results of these evaluations—and the enthusiasm of both students and instructors for MRT—need to be treated as preliminary. The research conducted by MRT's developers

involved very small samples, and neither their study nor the study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice randomly assigned ex-offenders to treatment and control groups. A breakdown of recidivism by original conviction (e.g., violent offenses, sex offenses, drug offenses) would also be helpful in judging the effectiveness of MRT for different offender populations.

How Delaware Uses MRT

Delaware's Life Skills teachers often integrate academics and applied life skills with Moral Reconation Therapy exercises to reinforce MRT goals and to lend relevance to these other subjects.* For example, Life Skills teacher George Dean reports, "In my unit on investments and credit, I raise ethical issues when students say they can beat the system by not paying the balance on a credit card. When I teach O. Henry short stories (and I tell them he spent time in jail as an embezzler), I have the students put all the characters on the board and ask what stage of moral behavior each one has reached in the MRT system, so I tie the reading into character building. The idea is to challenge their belief system repeatedly so they begin to think in terms of what is the right thing to do." (See "A Sample MRT Exercise on Moral Reasoning" for a description of a 3-hour class.) Carol Eagle, another teacher, agrees: "In every aspect of the program, I always ask them, 'Did you do the right thing?' " Eagle illustrated her point:

I had a student who had been in prison several times. During the family visit day, I asked everyone, including one of his children who came, "What do you miss most about the member of your family who's in prison?" This student's son answered, "My daddy belongs home. I miss him." There was a hush in the room, as the father began crying. Now, the father makes fewer excuses about not doing the right thing because I can remind him that there are people out there who need him—so "do good."

The Life Skills teachers integrate other important MRT themes into the entire program:

- Caring for others (see "Life Skills Fosters Caring").
- Being honest.
- Taking responsibility.
- Planning for the future.

Several students have made special mention of this last focus on planning:

Usually, you only think about when you're going to leave prison, but MRT forces you to think beyond the date of release.

The most important part of the [Life Skills] course is writing out your goals—what is the first thing you'll do when you get out, the second thing, and so on. My goals are to (1) get all the identification I need for a job and school; (2) attend adult high school to get a diploma and complete a course for nursing; (3) work for the Visiting Nurses' Association with my sister; and (4) get a bank account and save $50 a week. I never thought I could write down goals like this. If I feel I'm slipping up, I can go back to the [MRT] book and review them; I already do that here in prison. My whole life—my past and future—is in this book.

Life Skills Fosters Caring

Life Skills teachers make a sustained effort to get students to start to care about other people. One way they nurture caring is by requiring peer teaching. Teachers and students alike explain that, because students must complete workbooks as part of their course work, those who have difficulty reading and writing will need help from other students who have more advanced skills. According to one student:

Ms. [Carol] Eagle explains things on the board but then tells everyone to help each other: 'If you see someone needs help, go help them.' And she mixes small groups with more and less experienced people. Everyone's receptive to being helped—it amazed me. I never thought she would get peer participation. Even a guy who can't read at all, no one laughs at him, not even after class.

Another student put it this way:

At first, I was shaky on that [helping other students], because I wasn't used to it. Then I learned to care. For example, if Martin is having a problem with fractions, a couple guys help him out. At first, the teacher had someone sit with him to help. Now guys offer help spontaneously. Also, if a brother sees a guy slipping back into an argumentative mode, he might tell him to be careful: "Look, man, you're becoming defensive for nothing; Joe's entitled to his opinion . . . use his criticism or ignore it.

Fostering caring is also built into MRT, which requires 20 hours of documented volunteer work within the institution. For example, students clean the classroom, tutor other inmates outside of class, or draft letters for inmates who cannot write. The person who is helped signs a special form that the student submits to the teacher for credit.

Although MRT is the program's core, the teachers devote considerable attention to the other Life Skills components. Instructors are required to teach applied life skills and to use the American Correctional Association videotapes and handbook, *Cage Your Rage: An Inmate's Guide to Anger Control*.[9] Beyond this, teachers have flexibility in what and how they teach, including selecting their own textbooks and classroom materials.

Teachers are also free to determine the amount of time spent on each of the three components. For example, two teachers estimated they spend roughly 65 percent of classroom time on violence reduction (principally MRT), 20–25 percent on applied life skills, and 10–15 percent on academics. All the teachers devote the least time to academic skills because students can study them in other courses in the prison. According to Bruce Hobler, the former department of correction director of education who set up the Delaware program, "After the first program cycle, we found a lot of students were in or had already taken basic education programs. So rather than duplicate that, I allowed the teachers to spend more time on the other two components."

Life Skills Involves the Community

The teachers themselves added two other elements to the Life Skills Program—involving family members and bringing in guest speakers.

The Life Skills Program in general and MRT in particular place a strong emphasis on students reestablishing or improving ties with their families as one critical element of leading productive lives—whether in prison or on the outside.[10] Teacher George Dean telephones the family of every student at least once to inform them of the inmate's progress. "They're dumbfounded when I call," he says.

Then they ask if he [the inmate] is really okay, because they know he's lying when he *tells them he's okay. Sometimes the family member tells me she cries herself to sleep. . . . So I reassure her. I end up talking with some of them for 90 minutes. But I say only positive things to family members, and I try to enable the parent and kid to be honest with each other. But the family members end up talking later to their sons, telling them, "I want you to do really well in this program," which gives me more clout in the classroom. In addition, the students thank me for putting their moms at ease, because it makes them feel less guilty about what they've done to their families.*

The calls also challenge inmates' notion that people do things only if they expect a reward. Dean calls from his home phone on weekends or evenings, using his own time and money (see "Teachers Innovate—On Their Own Time").

Two students attested to the value of promoting family ties. One said:

Because of the program, I've been able to talk as a father and friend to my two adult daughters. My conversation is more open now with them and my mother. In the past, I never said much. Now I can tell them who I am and that I need their support to help me change. As a result, my daughters' attitudes toward me have changed. They used to visit me, but the visits were just a formality. Now I'm more interactive with them, so they are too. Life skills has been that—making me think about what I did 20 years ago and what I'll do in the future.

Another said:

I had never had a relationship with my dad. I was raised by a working mom. I blamed my father for my having stolen guns and ending up in jail. The pro-

Teachers Innovate—On Their Own Time

One day, teacher Isabel Companiony noticed a cross that a former student had made out of canvas and satin ribbon. That evening she stayed up until 2 a.m. writing a proposal for her students to start a small for-profit business making the crosses. The warden approved the plan and arranged a small cash advance to buy enough materials for 500 crosses.

After her students made an initial production run of 100 crosses, Companiony sold 75 at two State education workshops. She also contacted churches to solicit their interest in purchasing and reselling the crosses. The students sold the crosses for $1 each; of that, 12–15 cents went to reimburse the prison for materials, 50 cents was credited to individual inmate accounts for each cross they made that sold, and the churches that retailed the crosses kept the balance.

The activity has enabled Companiony to teach her students practical business skills (e.g., the concept of overhead) and create motivating math exercises (e.g., calculating profits).

Photo by Lewis C. Tuthill Productions

Students help each other in a small-group exercise.

gram changed my hatred for my father. Because of the program, I called him up. He was shocked to hear from me. I realized that I had neglected my dad—he didn't just neglect me.

Teachers in three of the institutions host a well-attended family event such as a picnic or inmate presentation followed by socializing during each program cycle. (Security considerations at the State's Multi-Purpose Facility make family days impossible to arrange.) Andrew Freeman, a student, explained:

Ms. Eagle invited family members twice to come to the prison. On one occasion she had the family members and students break into small groups—I wasn't in the same group with my mom—to discuss what various family members should do when an inmate comes home very late at night. Then each group reported its solutions to the whole class. In my group, a mom actually had a son who was going through this problem. The groups help each family to see how other families would solve the problem, and they also help everyone to see that everyone has the same problems.

All the teachers invite family members to attend graduation ceremonies. Typically, one or more students tell the assembly how the Life Skills Program has made a difference in their lives. On one occasion, three students sang a 1950s-style pop song they composed in honor of the program. The governor has spoken at three graduations; other speakers have included judges and State senators.

On their own initiative, teachers also bring in outside speakers to talk to students, primarily about making the transition to freedom after release. Representatives of the State's Department of Labor explain how ex-offenders can find decent jobs, entrepreneurs discuss how to start a small business, staff from the Department of Motor Vehicles explain how to get a driver's license or get a suspended license back, and the head of a polytechnical school describes how to enroll in free vocational courses after release from prison.

According to students, the speakers give them hope that they can succeed after release. A skeptical inmate reported:

I had my family call the polytech guy to verify it was true about the free classes. It was. I never thought there were any opportunities besides selling drugs and working at fast food joints. So you can't give the lame excuse, 'Man, there's nothing out there.' But it starts in here. You can't wait until you're ready for release to change your thinking and behavior and attitude.

Program Operations

There are four structural components of the Life Skills Program's operations: recruiting, staffing, housing, and followup.

Recruiting Students

During the 3 years the Life Skills Program was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the course was offered only to minimum- and medium-security inmates with at least 6 but no more than 22 months remaining on their sentences. These limits were chosen to schedule graduation approximate to release, to avoid enrolling inmates who would remain in prison for many years after completing the course, and to make sure that there would be enough applicants to make it possible to statistically analyze the evaluation data.

Once the State took over the program in 1996, these limitations were dropped to accommodate the many long-term minimum- and medium-security inmates who expressed a strong interest in the program.

The institutions' classification teams continue to screen out the few applicants with serious behavioral, mental, or physical problems that would interfere with attendance. Teachers, and sometimes the institutions' education supervisors, then screen applicants with personal interviews to make sure they are serious about doing the work required. Difficulty in reading or writing is no barrier to enrolling. In fact, applicants are not even tested for basic skills until after they have enrolled.

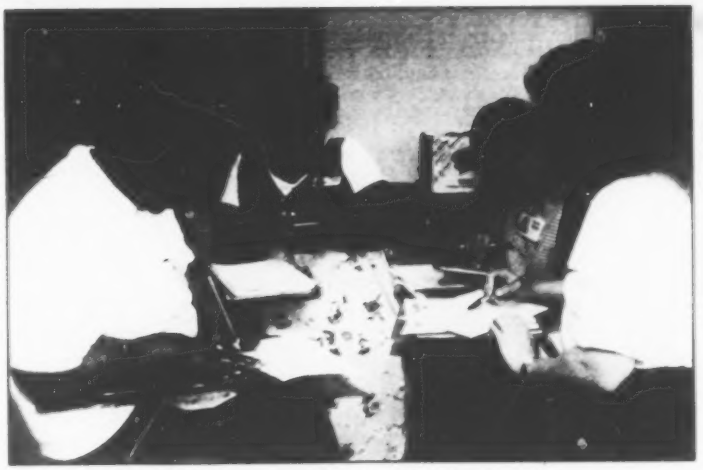

Photo by Lewis C. Tidball Productions

Students in the women's prison work on a math exercise together.

Initially the program had difficulty getting inmates to apply. The program was advertised through posters in dining halls and by each institution's education supervisor during information sessions with inmates. According to John Liptak, the program's first director, "Inmates wanted to know, 'What's in this for me?' Some of the men threw the program flier on the floor, saying, 'I don't need this!' " In response, Liptak and other staff members described the program, the opportunity for earning additional "good time," and the possibility of more favorable consideration at parole hearings. In addition to inmates' skepticism about the program, Life Skills had to compete with other institution programs for students.

By 1997, enrollment was no longer a problem. In fact, today's students consistently report that they heard about the program from other inmates who were attending or had graduated. As a result, word of mouth is the only outreach method now being used—and there is still a waiting list at some institutions for each new cycle. Interested inmates write letters to the teachers asking to enroll and explaining why they are interested in the program.

Why does the Life Skills Program no longer have a shortage of applicants? As described, inmates can get good time for participating in the program. Furthermore, inmates in the Multi-Purpose Facility, where Life Skills students are housed together in a special pod (see the section on housing), reported that one attractive feature of the program is the chance to live in an environment that is better regulated, more peaceful, and cleaner than in the other housing units. According to a program graduate, "The initial attraction for me was that the pod was a physically safe environment—for example, there was less stealing." Some inmates in the women's facility enroll because they have more freedom than in the other units: they are allowed to wear street clothes and walk unescorted to the medical unit and cafeteria. After the first cycle, however, most students reported they enrolled in the program because other inmates recommended it.

Staffing

When the Life Skills Program began in 1994, staff members included a full-time program administrator and five full-time instructors. As part of their regular duties, the education supervisors in the prisons assist with student recruitment. Bruce Hobler, former Life Skills project director, estimates that he also spent 50 to 60 percent of his time on the program during its first year and 40 percent of his time the following years. "It took a lot more time than I ever expected—being supportive, giving talks, making a videotape—but I'm glad I did it."

When the 3-year Federal demonstration project grant ended in 1996 and the State picked up the bill (see "Teamwork and Evaluation Win the Day"), the position of program administrator was dropped. However, Hobler continued as acting program administrator until he resigned from the department in August 1997.

Housing

Bruce Hobler believes it would be ideal if all Life Skills students in each institution lived together in housing units away from the general population. "Life Skills is a 24-hour program," he said. "Students need to apply what they learn in class to their everyday lives in prison and receive positive reinforcement for their changed behavior from other inmates." (Research tends to confirm this view—see "The Link Between Educational Programs and Reduced Recidivism.") However, with the exception of the multipurpose facility, none of the other institutions were able to establish such a housing arrangement.

Inmate movement presented a problem at Delaware's Multi-Purpose Facility because, with 32 housing units, inmates would have to come from all parts of the prison to attend classes—a logistical nightmare. When one of the institution's Life Skills teachers, Leroi Coit, explained the dilemma to the warden, the administrator agreed to move all Life Skills students into one minimum/medium pod, accommo-

Teamwork and Evaluation Win the Day

The commissioner of the Delaware Department of Correction had long been interested in correctional education. When the U.S. Department of Education issued a Request for Proposals to fund inmate education programs, the commissioner supported Bruce Hobler's interest in submitting a proposal. The department received its funding in November 1993.

Hobler asked a planner with the Delaware Criminal Justice Council, the State's criminal justice planning agency, to put together under his supervision what became the Life Skills Program curriculum. Hobler hired a project director in March 1994 and five instructors in April. The first Life Skills cycle began in June 1994.

Hobler also formed an Oversight Committee, which he chaired, that included the commissioner of corrections, the bureau chief of prisons, the education supervisors in each of the four institutions, the head of Veterans Affairs in Delaware (a bilingual specialist and educator), and a representative of the State Department of Labor. The committee was especially useful for getting the prisons' senior administrators to cooperate with the program, because the commissioner's highly visible participation on the committee made it clear that he fully supported the program. As a result, Hobler reports, "We had a much easier time getting what we needed for the program. For example, we were able to get inmates classified to the program in a short period of time and hold graduation ceremonies within the institutions with family members in attendance." Having the data processing center director on the committee with the commissioner also enabled the program to get the names of eligible inmates statewide in time to set up the first program cycle before word of mouth became the primary outreach approach. The committee met monthly from late 1993 until late 1994, then every 2 or 3 months until it was disbanded in 1995.

Before Federal funding ran out, Hobler prepared a budget that would support four instead of five teachers. However, the commissioner presented the program evaluator's preliminary results regarding Life Skills' promising impact on recidivism to the legislature's Joint Finance Committee, and the program received funding for five teachers—all new monies for the department. (See "Program Costs" for a breakdown of the first 3 years.)

According to Representative Richard Davis, Chair of the legislature's Joint Finance Committee, the program's preliminary evaluation results were influential in motivating the legislature to take over the program's funding. "The budget committee looks hard at programs begun with Federal funding to determine whether they are producing good results. The information we had on the Life Skills Program was that it was helping to prepare inmates to leave prison and not come back. We don't have a lot of prison programs that have a good handle on reducing recidivism, so if Life Skills had any chance of reducing recidivism, we felt it was worth keeping."

dating 60 inmates near the classroom. Although half the residents were not current Life Skills students, most of them were program graduates with time left to serve.

Coit screened the officers who supervise the pod, because he wanted only those who would support the program. For example, officers would be required to enforce quiet time for study hall, restricting even nonprogram residents from watching TV during this time. Officers would also be asked to recommend inmates who should be dropped from the program because of poor behavior in the unit or even in the corridors. Coit appointed four Life Skills graduates living in the pod as peer counselors, who helped students when problems arose, assisted them with homework, and prevented disrespectful behavior (see "Graduates Who Remain in Prison Still Benefit From Life Skills").

At a brief reunion, four program graduates—all now working full time in the community—reminisced about their experiences when living in the pod.

Graduate A [a member of the first class to live in the pod]: *When we were graduating, it was a big concern for me whether I would be forced back into a negative environment. But because of Leon Coit, we could stay in the pod's positive environment before we hit the streets. You can't use the tools you learn in Life Skills as well if you get put back into [the general prison] population.*

Graduate B: *By remaining in the pod, the [Life Skills] graduates acted as role models for the new students.*

Graduate C: *Thirty people ended up bonding together. When someone began slipping—for example, cussing—we would talk to him—"Pull up on your language."*

Graduates Who Remain in Prison Still Benefit From Life Skills

Ideally, the program is best suited to students who are released soon after the course ends. However, even inmates who remain incarcerated for years after the program ends appear to benefit. According to current student Andrew Freeman, "I don't get released until 2009, but Life Skills will help me deal with my time in jail—to be more patient, not be upset at little things I can't control, recognize that I'm not always right, be more tolerant. I used to be argumentative—I had to be right and I took everything personally. Now I'm more laid back. For example, when I suggested that a guy in class try not to keep saying "uh ... uh" during a mock interview, he told me to go get some Noxema for my acne. But I didn't react hostile like I would have in the past. I've learned to walk away from people who just want to argue."

Graduate D: *You knew that if you cried, you wouldn't be held as a sissy, because we'd all had the same classroom experiences.*

Followup

"One area in which the program is weak," according to Bruce Hobler, "is in the transition to the community after release." Hobler had originally planned for Life Skills graduates to complete the first 12 steps of Moral Reconation Therapy in prison and the final 4 under the supervision of specially trained probation officers. However, even though funding was obtained for training the officers in MRT and one officer received training and began holding group sessions, the plan was abandoned because the probation system did not allow for Life Skills graduates to be assigned to specific probation officers.

As a result, Leroi Coit took it upon himself to create an opportunity for graduates within easy travel distance of the State's largest city, Wilmington, to meet for mutual support after release. The meetings also served as an early warning system to identify emerging problems that he and the group could help short circuit. Coit obtained permission from a local community center to use a conference room 1 hour a week for these meetings. He opened the meetings to program graduates from all four institutions and sent them all fliers. Usually only 5 or 6 graduates come to each meeting—although as many as 12 have attended—because they develop time-consuming commitments to work and family.

Coit remembers a graduate who had been out of prison for a year telling the group that he was starting to have problems making ends meet with his unskilled job. "He had been a drug dealer, and he began wondering whether he should start dealing again. Another member of the group said, 'Why don't you come with me to see Ed Lucus [an employer relations representative with the Department of Labor who had been a guest speaker in the class]?' The graduate met with Lucus, was placed in electrical school for 3 months, found a job, and was licensed."

The Importance of Finding Qualified Staff

According to Bruce Hobler, "The power of the program lies in its capacity to hire and train correctional educators who are motivated to help incarcerated students." The teachers need to be qualified to provide instruction in adult basic education, but, as previously noted, they spend most of their time teaching MRT and applied life skills. As a result, more important to their success than any formal credentials are thorough training in these two areas and, above all, the following personality characteristics:

- Creativity (e.g., linking characters in a short story to the MRT stages of moral development).
- Flexibility (e.g., switching back and forth, as needed, between MRT, life skills, and academics).
- Stamina (teaching two 3-hour classes a day with often outspoken and unhappy students).
- A willingness to extend themselves beyond the technical requirements of the job (e.g., telephoning relatives in the evenings and on weekends).

The instructors have to be especially talented to teach MRT properly. For example, they have to be able to:

- Handle the intense emotions MRT exercises can elicit among students (see "Tension—and Improvisation—in a Life Skills Class).
- Model the behaviors they try to instill in their students, including openness, honesty, and not always acting in the expectation of a material reward.
- Challenge students constantly to live up to their own stated priorities and goals.

In fact, while they are in the program, and in many cases for their entire period of incarceration, students spend more time with their Life Skills teachers than with anyone else.

Because obtaining unusually capable instructors was of the utmost importance, Hobler instituted a lengthy screening process. He first assembled an eight-member panel that included not only the four institutions' education supervisors but also the director of the State Department of Veterans' Affairs (a former educator) and the State supervisor of adult education. Panel subgroups shared the work of narrowing down the 95 applicants to 20, mindful of the two most important qualifications—experience with both adult and correctional education. The entire panel then interviewed each of the 20 remaining candidates, individually rating each applicant's responses

Tension—and Improvisation—in a Life Skills Class

Janet Lopez, a former Life Skills teacher, tells the following story to illustrate a number of features of the program, including the need to address students' immediate needs, the highly charged emotions the course can elicit, the value of student honesty and trust in each other, the need to learn to control violent behavior, and the importance of caring for others.

When I noticed that a big-time drug dealer was extremely upset during one class, I took him outside the room to ask what was going on. He told me that he had just learned that his 15-year-old daughter had gotten pregnant while he was in prison and was moving out of their home. He was so angry he wanted to hit someone, so he felt he should go off by himself so he wouldn't have the opportunity. Instead, I proposed that he return to class and do a role play of the situation, but I emphasized that he could not hit anyone. "You can curse and scream if you need to," I said. He agreed to give it a chance. So I explained the problem to the class and asked for two volunteers to play his daughter and the daughter's boyfriend. Several macho inmates offered to be the daughter!

The father, playing himself, started out by asking his "daughter," "You know I love you, you're my baby. Why did you do this? You're so young!" He then began crying, repeating, "I love you." Then he turned to the "boyfriend" and yelled, "How dare you! You're stealing my daughter. How can you provide for her?"

"Boyfriend": "But I love her."

Father: "But you're a child. How can you support her?"

"Boyfriend": "By working in my family's construction business. I'm sorry, but I will take care of our child."

Eventually, the father got up and held his "daughter," saying, "Please don't leave the house, I'll help you." Then he began to calm down. He never did hit anyone. Instead, after he graduated, Leroi Coit and I made him a peer counselor in the pod. After his release, he took classes to become a cook, and now he's a chef. He reconciled with his daughter right after his release. His daughter did move out, but her child's father is supporting her and the baby. He told me, "You saved me with that role play."

to a common set of questions on a 1 to 5 scale with written comments.

Teaching two 3-hour classes 5 days a week for 4 straight months and often dealing with emotionally charged issues can be exhausting and stressful. As one teacher said, "Sometimes I'm so drained from doing MRT in my morning class that I just don't do it in my afternoon class." Despite these challenges, on their evaluation forms students routinely rate the teachers very highly—from 3.57 to 3.77 on a 4-point scale. Students also comment spontaneously about how energized and caring the instructors are:

Miss Eagle teaches everything for 3 hours, and she's always pushing us. Where does she get the energy?
—A Life Skills student

After 2 months, I didn't want to have to get up so early any more, but Miss Izzy [Isabel Companiony] came and woke me up for 2 straight weeks. I was very impressed that she would bother to do that. Another time, I became very frustrated and said I was quitting, but she offered me help after class and that made me see it through.
—A Life Skills Student

Evidence of Effectiveness

Students and teachers alike are enthusiastic about Delaware's Life Skills Program.

I was on my unit doing nothing—gambling and talking slick and hustling inside the institution—the same things I did on the outside, and I got tired of it. So when my friend enrolled, I decided to enroll. It broke the monotony of jail, gave me structure. The Cage Your Rage book and videos, and acting out prison scenes—for example, someone knocking over your cup of coffee—helped me deal with my anger. I used to get angry if someone on the basketball court called a foul. The program taught me a different perspective—considering the consequence of my actions.
—A released program graduate

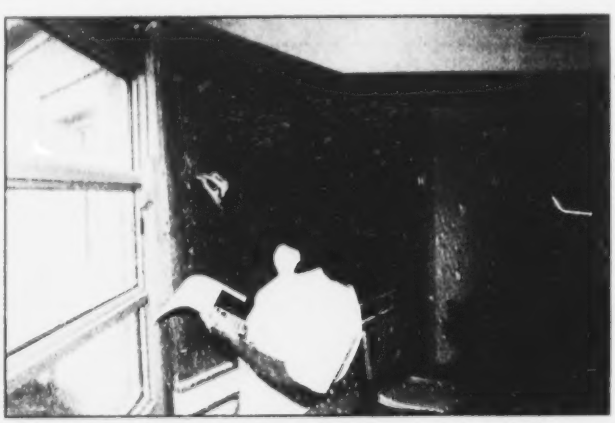

Photo by Lewis C. Tidball Productions

An inmate in the women's prison writes her answers to a math exercise on the chalkboard for other students to check.

Many family members of inmates have told me they see improvements in their son (or brother), such as more frequent and honest communication, and letters thanking them for taking care of their children and talking about their plans when they are released. Some family members tell me, "This is the first program he's ever stuck with."

—George Dean, Life Skills teacher

What do the evaluation data say? During the first 6 program cycles between June 1994 and November 1996, 826 students enrolled in the program. Nearly 85 percent of enrollees graduated—699 inmates. Of the 15 percent (127 enrollees) who dropped out, most (64) left because of institutional movement (e.g., to work release centers) or early release. Forty-four students dropped out, and 19 were expelled for behavior problems.

Of the 826 students enrolled in the program, 68 percent were African-American, 5 percent Hispanic, and 26 percent non-Hispanic white. Nearly half the students (49 percent) were between the ages of 20 and 29, and more than one-third (35 percent) were between 30 and 39 years old. Thirty-eight percent of students were sentenced for a crime of violence; 39 percent were convicted of nonviolent drug offenses.

Marsha Miller, an outside evaluator, established two principal impact objectives for the Life Skills Program and then collected the data and assessed how well each objective was achieved during the program's first 3 years.[11] To measure achievement, Miller attempted to establish control groups of inmates in each of the four institutions by randomly assigning applicants to the program or to a control group. However, because of the small pool of eligible inmates in the prisons and other reasons, she was able to establish a control group only for the first program cycle at two prisons (with 25 inmates and 23 inmates, respectively) and for the third program cycle at a third prison (34 inmates). In the fourth institution, the women's prison, Miller used sentenced inmates leaving the institution in 1989 as a comparison group. The principal objectives for the program follow.

Objective 1: Better Scores.

After graduation, students will have a significantly greater average score in academic and applied skills than control group inmates. Because nearly a third of the sentenced inmates in Delaware participate in other educational programming, any increases in academic performance among Life Skills Program students might have been due to their other course work. Therefore, comparing students' scores with those of other inmates would have been the next step in evaluating the program's effects. However, most inmates in the control groups, all of whom had been tested before they were excluded from the Life Skills Program, refused to answer additional survey questions once they learned they could not enroll. Pretest and posttest results among Life Skills participants did show statistically significant improvements in self-esteem, more appropriate expressions of anger, and constructive attitudes toward finding employment after release (e.g., planning to rely on a job search rather than on luck).

Objective 2: Reduced Recidivism.

Student recidivism will be 7 percentage points lower than the control group. The program defined recidivism as a pending charge or a misdemeanor or felony conviction in the first year following release. Marsha Miller concluded that 7 percent was the minimum reduction in recidivism that would enable the State to recoup the costs of the program by avoiding criminal justice system expenses to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate this percentage of ex-offenders.

The data for program participants include information on inmates who failed to graduate. Because control group members were free to attend other programs, Miller could assess only the value of the Life Skills Program as an enhancement to existing correctional programs, not the program's value compared with no rehabilitation programming.

Overall, the recidivism objective was met. For the first program cycle, the rate for Life Skills students in all four prisons was 19 percent, and for the control group members, it was 27 percent—a reduction of eight points. However, at one of the four prisons the recidivism rate was higher for Life Skills students than for control group members. Students in this prison remained incarcerated longer after program graduation than students in the other prisons; the program may be less effective when too much time elapses between graduation and release.

The recidivism objective was met at three of four institutions. However, there was difficulty establishing control groups for every cycle in every institution. This leaves open the possibility that the program achieved its recidivism objective because it served the most motivated or capable inmates.

Photo by Lewis C. Tidball Productions

Students review the instructions for completing an MRT exercise.

In addition, the numbers in all four institutions are small because as of 1996 few inmates had been released into the community for at least 1 year. As a result, even when cycle one students from all three institutions and control group members are combined, the recidivism difference is not statistically significant.

As more students and control group members have lived in the community for at least 1 year, it will be possible to provide more valid assessments of the program's impact on recidivism. Furthermore, Miller is now comparing recidivism rates between the groups over a 2-year period. The cumulative second-year results for female students (compared with the 1989 baseline females) and for male students (compared with the control group members) in the program's first cycle are promising. Whereas only 3 of 20 female Life Skills participants have been charged or convicted 2 years after release, 171 of 335 females in the comparison group (51 percent) have recidivated after 2 years. Similarly, 9 of 40 male Life Skills participants have recidivated in the 2 years since their release, compared with 10 of 20 control group members. Miller concludes, "If the 2-year cumulative recidivism results continue to be so promising when all inmates from the first program cycle can be included (once they have been released into the community for at least 2 years), then Life Skills will have more than met its recidivism objective and the results will be statistically significant."

Replicating the Program

The following keys to implementing Delaware's program successfully are within the grasp of any jurisdiction:

- Involve local stakeholders (e.g., a representative from the State Department of Labor) and other top prison officials (e.g., the commissioner and head of security) in planning the program.

- Hire highly qualified teachers, send them for MRT training, and encourage them to be creative.

- House students in the same pod or work with security staff to arrange for their timely transport to and from class.

In replicating the program, John Liptak, its first director, warns against assuming that every prison in a State system operates similarly. He found that each institution in Delaware was unique, with its own informal rules and regulations. "So you have to deal with each facility as an independent, unique entity, rather than assuming that the commissioner will be able to arrange for consistent treatment for the program in every facility," Liptak said. Furthermore, for the evaluation to be valid, it is essential that the program operate consistently within each institution—for example, inmates are recruited using similar methods, teachers have the same supplies and facilities, and the same number of inmates participate in each class.

Liptak advised, "Work closely with the wardens. Meet with them in advance to describe what you wish to do so they understand your plans and can anticipate potential problems at their institutions." For example, although the commissioner said that students would be entitled to good time for participating, one warden felt that the program did not qualify for good time. Some institutions, but not others, were concerned about such things as teachers having scissors. Liptak reported, "I spent the majority of my time the first year dealing with wardens, deputy wardens, and captains ironing out all these issues."

Building in evaluation from the start and developing an effective approach to supporting students after they are released from prison are important when replicating a Delaware-style Life Skills Program. Delaware's program incorporated an evaluation that played a major role in motivating the legislature to provide funding after Federal Government support ended. Although the program was unable to implement a postrelease support component, programs in other jurisdictions have managed to develop aftercare services using funding from their departments of corrections and from grants.[12]

Other jurisdictions seeking help in adopting Delaware's approach to a life skills program can find additional resources in "Sources for Further Information."

Sources for More Information

For information on implementing a Delaware-style Life Skills Program, contact:

Bruce Hobler, Ph.D.
Former Project Director
Delaware Life Skills Program
2653 Abington Road
Wilmington, DE 19810
Telephone: 302–475–1496

The **Delaware Department of Correction** used part of its Federal funding to develop a videotape, largely as a tool for training its instructors in MRT but also to promote replication of the program in other jurisdictions. For a copy of the tape and the final evaluation report, contact:

Anthony R. Farina
Chief of Media Relations
Delaware Department of Correction
80 Monrovia Avenue
Smyrna, DE 19977
Telephone: 302–739–5601
Fax: 302–653–2853
E-mail: afarina@state.de.us

The Office of Correctional Education (OCE) within the U.S. Department of Education was created by Congress in 1991 to provide technical assistance, grant funding, and research data to the corrections and correctional education fields. To speak with a program specialist and to receive relevant publications such as *Choosing Life Skills: A Guide for Selecting Life Skills Programs for Adult and Juvenile Offenders*, contact:

Richard Smith
Director
Office of Correctional Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education
600 Independence Avenue S.W.
MES 4529
Washington, DC 20202–7242
Telephone: 202–205–5621
Fax: 202–401–2615
World Wide Web site: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/OCE

The **National Institute of Justice (NIJ)** is the research and development agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. For information about NIJ's efforts in corrections, program development, and corporate partnership development, contact:

Marilyn C. Moses
Program Manager
National Institute of Justice
810 Seventh Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20531
Telephone: 202–514–6205
Fax: 202–307–6256

The National Institute of Justice established the **National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)** in 1972 to serve as a national and international clearinghouse for exchange of criminal justice information. For more information about topical searches, bibliographies, custom searches, and other available services, contact:

NCJRS
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
Telephone: 800–851–3420 (8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday)
E-mail: askncjrs@ncjrs.org

For specific criminal justice questions or requests via the Internet, send an e-mail message to the above address.

The **Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement (OCJTP)** within the National Institute of Corrections was created in March 1995 to:

- Cooperate with and coordinate the efforts of other Federal agencies in the areas of job training and placement.
- Collect and disseminate information on offender job training and placement programs, accomplishments, and employment outcomes.
- Provide training to develop staff competencies in working with offenders and ex-offenders.
- Provide technical assistance to State and local training and employment agencies.

For more information, contact:

John E. Moore
Coordinator
Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement
National Institute of Corrections
320 First Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20534
Telephone: 800–995–6423, ext. 147

The **National Institute of Corrections** offers literature searches and free technical assistance regarding prison and jail programming. Contact:

NIC Information Center
1860 Industrial Circle, Suite A
Longmont, CO 80501
Telephone: 800–877–1461

The **Correctional Education Association (CEA)**, affiliated with the American Correctional Association (ACA), is an international professional organization serving education program needs within the field of corrections. Membership includes teachers and other community corrections program personnel. Members receive a quarterly journal and newsletter, an annual directory, and a yearbook. *Cage Your Rage: An Inmate's Guide to Anger Control* videotapes and handbooks are available from ACA's Division of Communications and Publications (see note 9 for details). Annual conferences are held in each of CEA's nine regions and many of its State chapters. One of the regions hosts an international conference with workshops on successful instructional strategies. Contact:

Alice Tracy
Assistant Director
Correctional Education Association
4380 Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, MD 20706
Telephone: 301–918–1915
Fax: 301–918–1846

Correctional Counseling, Inc. staff developed the materials and training for Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT) and offer MRT training courses and publications, such as *How to Escape Your Prison*, for correctional educators. In addition, they offer other publications on topics such as anger management, counseling approaches for offenders, relapse prevention, job readiness, family support, and others. Additional information may be obtained from:

Ken Robinson, Ed.D.
President, Correctional Counseling, Inc.
3155 Hickory Hill Road, Suite 104
Memphis, TN 38115
Telephone: 901–360–1564
Fax: 901–365–6146
E-mail: ccimrt@aol.com

Notes

1. The literature on moral reasoning and criminal justice is reviewed in MacKenzie, D.L., and R. Brame, "Moral Reconation Therapy and Problem Behavior in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections," Unpublished Paper, College Park: University of Maryland, n.d.: 6–7.

2. All 18 programs were required to evaluate their efforts. However, the Delaware Life Skills Program was chosen to be the topic of a Program Focus because its evaluation was thorough and it showed promising results. In addition, the State agreed to fund the program after Federal support ended.

3. Because the minimum-security area at the Delaware Correctional Center is a separate part of the prison, only minimum- and medium-security inmates were able to enroll in the program. As a result, during preparations for the third program cycle, one Life Skills class was placed in a medium-security area in the institution, while the other remained in the minimum-security area.

4. The MRT curriculum is based on research into stages of moral and cognitive development previously explored, particularly by Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget. See Kohlberg, L., "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach," in *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues*, ed. T. Lickona, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976: 31–53; Piaget, J., and B. Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child*, New York: Basic Books, 1969.

5. Little, G.L., and K.D. Robinson, *How to Escape Your Prison*, Memphis, Tennessee: Eagle Wing Books, Inc., 1986. To obtain copies, contact Correctional Counseling, Inc., listed in the Sources for Further Information section.

6. Little, G.L., K.D. Robinson, K.D. Burnette, and E.S. Swan, "Seven-Year Recidivism of Felony Offenders Treated with MRT," *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment Review* 4 (1995): 6.

7. MacKenzie, D.L., R. Brame, A.R. Waggoner, and K.D. Robinson, *Examination of the Impact of Moral Reconation Therapy in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1996, NCJ 163413. For free copies, contact the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849–6000, call 800–851–3420, or e-mail askncjrs@ncjrs.org.

   The researchers estimated participants' likelihood of "failure" while in prison (i.e., misconduct) by comparing the number of incidents they were involved in before enrolling in MRT with the number they committed after graduation. The researchers also estimated a probability of failure based on inmate characteristics that are known to be associated with misconduct, such as sex, age, and criminal history. The researchers estimated participants' likelihood of failure after release (recidivism) in two similar ways. The researchers also examined whether program participants enrolled in MRT who were serving a second prison sentence reoffended a third time after release. For program participants who were first-time offenders, the researchers used characteristics known to be associated with recidivism to determine whether the releasees could have been expected to recidivate if they had not enrolled in MRT.

8. Marsha Miller, the program's independent evaluator, suggests that to be most effective MRT needs to be incorporated into a life skills program. "First," she says, "inmates become adept at saying what MRT instructors want to hear—for example, verbalizing such goals as getting married and finding work—but without necessarily making the commitment to achieve these goals. When MRT is part of a life skills program, instructors have the opportunity to verify whether inmates are actually taking the steps necessary to achieve their goals, such as signing up for a GED or Adult Basic Education course or enrolling in a prison industry program. Second, inmates usually have no idea about how to go about meeting their goals—they don't have information about education and training programs available to them after release, about how to open a checking account and balance their checkbook, and about all the other information and skills most citizens take for

granted. A life skills program is necessary to give inmates the tools they need to achieve their goals." John Liptak, the program's first director, observes, "Life Skills is the best way to run the entire prison system education department. Abolish GED courses and other education classes and integrate them into a life skills program, because developing academic skills is not enough for inmates. They also need to learn decisionmaking skills, how to write a resume, and other practical skills that will enable them to succeed after release."

9. To obtain copies of *Cage Your Rage: An Inmate's Guide to Anger Control*, write the American Correctional Association (ACA), Division of Communications and Publications, 4380 Forbes Boulevard, Lanham, MD 20706, or call 1–800–222–5646. The book is $10 for ACA members ($12.50 for nonmembers), and the package of four videotapes is $368 for members ($460 for nonmembers).

10. Few studies have examined whether inmates who maintain or improve ties with family members are less likely to reoffend than inmates who do not keep these ties. One study found that inmates who had continuing visits from family members had lower recidivism rates than inmates who did not. The researchers reported that differential motivation among the inmates who maintained family ties was unlikely to have been responsible for the reduced recidivism rates because the inmates did not exhibit increased motivation in other respects. For example, they had the same rates of disciplinary reports and participation in treatment programs as the other inmates. (Holt, N., and D. Miller, *Exploration in Inmate-Family Relationships*, Report No. 46, Sacramento: California Department of Corrections, January 1972.) Another study examined 400 inmates who participated in a family reunion program in a New York State prison that included meeting privately with family members on facility grounds. This study found that program participants who had been released for at least 1 year had a significantly lower recidivism rate (19.6 percent) than the rate projected for the overall population of inmates (26.5 percent) (MacDonald, D.G., "Follow-Up Study Sample of Family Reunion Program Participants," Albany: New York State Department of Correctional Services, Division of Program Planning, 1986). Findings of at least two other empirical studies suggest there may be a relationship between inmate-family ties during incarceration and recidivism (Hairston, C.F., "Family Ties During Imprisonment: Do They Influence Future Criminal Activity?" *Federal Probation* 52 (1) (1988): 48–52). While suggestive, none of these studies involved the use of a control group, so it remains possible that the inmates who maintained their family ties would have experienced relatively low rates of recidivism even if they had not kept in touch. They may have simply been more motivated to succeed, or there might have been a nurturing family structure waiting to support them after release, regardless of whether they had maintained family ties while incarcerated.

11. Miller, M.L., "Evaluation of the Life Skills Program," Wilmington, Delaware: Division of Correctional Education, Department of Correction, 1997.

12. See, for example, the following Program Focuses from NIJ: *Texas' Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders)*, NCJ 168637; *Chicago's Safer Foundation: A Road Back for Ex-Offenders*, NCJ 167575; and *Successful Job Placement for Ex-Offenders: The Center for Employment Opportunities*, NCJ 168102. For free copies, contact the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849–6000, 800–851–3420. For online copies, access NIJ on the World Wide Web (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij).

About This Study

This document was written by Peter Finn, Senior Research Associate, Abt Associates Inc. Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

On the cover: Students listen attentively to another student making an important point about an MRT exercise.

(Photo by Lewis C. Tidball Productions, New Castle, Delaware).

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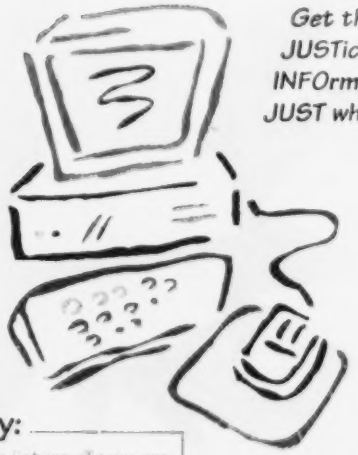

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